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PHI BETA KAPPA SOCIETY: PAST AND PRESENT*

The story of how, in the very year that saw the birth of our Republic, a little group of five students at William and Mary gathered together and organized the first Greek-letter fraternity in this country, the Phi Beta Kappa, is familiar enough to those who have made any historical study of the social and literary activities in our American colleges. The words of the original record have been often quoted:—

“On Thursday, the 5th of December, in the year of our Lord God one thousand seven hundred and seventy-six, and the first of the common-wealth, a happy spirit and resolution of attaining the important ends of society entering the minds of John Heath, Thomas Smith, Richard Booker, Armistead Smith, and John Jones, and afterwards seconded by others, prevailed, and was accordingly ratified.

“And for the better establishment and sanctitude of our unanimity, a square silver medal was agreed on and instituted, engraved on one side with S. P., the initials of the Latin S—P—, and on the other, agreeable to the former, with the Greek initials of Phi Beta Kappa, and an index imparting a philosophical design, extended to the three stars, a part of the planetary orb, distinguished.

“In consequence of this, on Wednesday, the 5th of January, 1777, a session was held, in order both to adopt a mode of initiation and to provide for its better security.

“And first in corporation, an oath of fidelity being considered the strongest preservative, an initiation was accordingly resolved upon, and instituted as follows:—

“‘I, A. B., do swear on the Holy Evangelists of Almighty God, or otherwise, as calling on the Supreme Being to attest my oath, that I will, with all my possible efforts, endeavor to prove true, just and deeply attached to this our growing fraternity;

* This article embodies material used in an address before the Tulane Chapter of the Phi Beta Kappa Society, June 2, 1914; but new material has been added and the paper has been recast.—EDITOR.

in keeping, holding, and preserving all secrets that pertain to my duty, and for the promotion and advancement of its internal welfare.'

"Whereupon the oath of fidelity being thus prescribed and instituted, was afterwards severally administered to the respective gentlemen, viz.: John Heath, Thomas Smith, Richard Booker, Armistead Smith, John Jones, Daniel Fitzhugh, John Stuart, Thomas Fitzhugh, and John Stork, as the first essays or rudiments to an initiation. In consequence of this, we severally, freely, and jointly proceeded to the election of officers proper and most suitable to its internal regulation."

At the ensuing meeting of March 1, 1777, a set of laws was adopted such as were "proper and most conducive to the advantage of our growing fraternity." Two weeks later three new members were elected, and on November 29 two more were added to the society, making at the close of the first year a total membership of fourteen out of a student-body of about forty.

In the laws as first adopted a resolution provided that "no gentleman be initiated into the Society but Collegians and such only as have arrived to the age of sixteen years, and from the Grammar Master upwards; and further, before his disposition be sufficiently inspected, nor then without the unanimous approbation of the Society." Thus all students of the Grammar School, or preparatory department of the college, were excluded, as well as outsiders. Membership was limited strictly to academic circles.

On December 10, 1778, however, it was "Resolved that in future admission to this Society be not confined to collegians alone." Without relaxing the regulation excluding the Grammar School students, this resolution seems to have been designed to admit older students corresponding somewhat to our graduates, and even to extend its privileges to those who were not in any way connected with school or college. Among non-collegians admitted to the parent chapter at Williamsburg as a result of this resolution were: John Marshall, afterwards Chief Justice of the United States, at that time Captain of the Third Virginia Regiment of Continental Line; William Pierce, Captain of the First Continental Artillery; William Madison, brother of

President Madison, a volunteer in the militia cavalry; and George Lee Turberville, Captain of the Fifteenth Virginia Regiment. These four gentlemen, being stationed with the army near Williamsburg, were elected to membership in the society. It is to be noted, however, that these maturer men entered the society after its organization had been perfected, so that they presumably had no great influence in determining its policy or in directing its growth.

Not only was membership in the parent chapter thus extended to non-collegians, but there was evident from the first a spirit of expansion and of missionary zeal for establishing chapters elsewhere in the State and in the newly formed Confederation. It was held to be "repugnant to the liberal principles of societies that they should be confined to any particular place, men, or description of men," and it was resolved that "they should be extended to the wise and virtuous of every degree and of whatever country." Another resolution of this same year (1779) expressed the desire of the society to extend itself to "each of the United States." On May 8, 1779, "It being suggested that it might tend to promote the designs of this institution [William and Mary] and redound to the honor and advantage thereof at the same time that others more remote or distant be attached thereto," there was drawn up and adopted a formal charter, according to which two or more brothers of the Phi Beta Kappa, "such as shall to the general meeting be thought to merit such a trust," be empowered on due application to initiate a fraternity correspondent to the original society.

Applications were at once made by various members for charters to establish branches in the State of Virginia, and five such charters were granted; one for a chapter in Richmond, one in Westmoreland county, and three others with the names of the places not given. It does not appear that these branches were to be attached to any college or institution of learning. No records remain of these chapters, which, if ever actually established, must have come to an end during the storm and stress of the Revolution.

Full credit for organizing this policy of expansion is due, not to Elisha Parmele as is generally supposed, but to Samuel

Hardy, who entered William and Mary in 1776, was elected member of the House of Delegates in Virginia in 1781, and two years later became a member of the Continental Congress. According to William Short, who was president of the society from 1778 until its suspension in 1781, it was "Samuel Hardy who first communicated the plan of extending the branches of our society to the different States. He expatiated on the great advantages that would attend in binding together the different States."

But the conviction seems to have been common to all the members of this devoted little band of brothers that their ideals should be disseminated throughout all parts of the colonies as a means of bringing them into more intimate union. Striking evidence of this feeling is exhibited in a letter from a Virginia brother, John Beckley, then in the State Legislature, to Elizur Goodrich, of Yale College. The date is 1782, after the suspension of the Williamsburg chapter and during the supreme crisis of the Revolution:—

"How long the madness of the human race will continue, and the ravages and distress of a destructive war be permitted, is only for Superior Wisdom to determine; but in the event of a return of peace I trust to see the extended influence of the Phi Beta Kappa in its numerous branches; and at no distant period, produce a union through the various climes and countries of this great continent, of all lovers of literary merit, founded on the broad basis of a virtuous emulation, and which shall be no less happy and important in preserving the future peace and grandure [sic] of the United States, than that confederacy which has led America to the present possession of national glory and independence, through innumerable difficulties and distresses; and to this great end, give me leave to hope, all our future exertions will be pointed." ¹

The same liberal and enthusiastic spirit possessed the minds of the Harvard brethren, who were equally firm in their conviction that their infant society could and should play an important part in effecting a harmonious and permanent union of

¹ Copied from the Yale records through the kindness of the secretary of the United Chapters, the Rev. Oscar M. Vorhees.

the widely separated colonies; for in this very same year (1782) when the Harvard chapter was barely twelve months old, the president of that chapter wrote to the president of the Yale chapter as follows:—

“I conceive that the institution of the Phi Beta Kappa will have a happy tendency to destroy the prejudices that too frequently subsist between different universities; to make them act upon more liberal principles, and seek the mutual advantages of the several societies with which they may by this institution be connected.”

Surely here is noteworthy evidence of the first stirring of a national spirit among the youth of America at a time before the adoption of the Constitution and even before all the States had been brought to give full assent to the Articles of Confederation. Though the aims of the Phi Beta Kappa were never at any time primarily political, as was the case with the Illuminati and other contemporary student clubs in Germany and other parts of Europe, the society in its very infancy sought to contribute its share towards binding the States together in happy union at a time when some of these States were more remote from one another than New York now is from London, and when each State was inclined to be exceedingly jealous of its own rights.

Before tracing the growth of the society in New England, to which, as we shall see, it was transplanted, it will be well to complete the story of the Williamsburg chapter up to the time of its suspension.

For four years the society continued to flourish at William and Mary, enrolling a total of exactly fifty members during that period, but at the end of that time the approach of the British troops caused the doors of the college to be closed and the mother chapter ceased to exist till it was revived in 1849. The last entry in these early records is full of hope and faith in the future: “On Saturday, the 6th of January (1781), a meeting of the Phi Beta Kappa was called for the purpose of securing the papers of the society during the confusion of the times and the present dissolution which threatens the University. The members who attended were William Short, Daniel C. Brent, Spencer Roane, Peyton Short, and Landon Cabell. They

thinking it most advisable that the papers should not be removed, determined to deliver them sealed into the hands of the College steward, to remain with him until the desirable event of the society's resurrection. And this deposit they make in the sure and certain hope that the fraternity will one day rise to life everlasting and glory immortal."

Sophomoric as this may sound, these young fellows were tremendously in earnest and in those brief four years laid the foundations of the society so broad and deep that when, at the "instance and petition of our good Brother Elisha Parmele of the University of Cambridge of Massachusetts Bay," authority was unanimously voted to establish chapters in Yale and Harvard, the organization took root at once in the new soil.

A native of Connecticut, Parmele had studied at Yale for two years and then entering Harvard had secured his bachelor's degree there in 1778. Now he had come to Williamsburg for his health and was initiated to membership in the society July 31, 1779. Having conceived of the plan of extending the society to other colonies, Hardy, who was the first member to apply for a charter, evidently saw in the presence of Parmele a fine opportunity for carrying it out. Parmele's reputation for scholarship and upright Christian character doubtless led Hardy to feel that here was the ideal man for his purpose. Indeed, only three weeks after Hardy had procured his charter, at a called meeting Parmele was recommended as a worthy member of the society and on a ballot being taken was unanimously elected in due form.

In a letter of William Short to Edward Everett, written in 1831, the writer, after speaking of Hardy's plan for establishing branches in other States, continues: "I happened at that time to be acquainted with a gentleman from the Eastward who was a private tutor in the family of one of my friends, and as I knew he then contemplated returning to his native State, I suggested to Mr. Hardy the propriety of bringing forward his plan before the society, so that the charter might be ready to be sent by this gentleman. It was accordingly done. If my memory serves me, a charter of the same kind was sent at the same time to New Haven." Though not mentioned by name, there can be no

question that this "gentleman from the Eastward" was Parmele himself. Dr. Edward Everett Hale in his sketch of the Phi Beta Kappa (one of the most delightful articles on the society ever written) entitled "A Fossil from the Tertiary" in the *Atlantic Monthly* for July, 1879, calls Parmele "the St. Paul who carried the society from its birthplace to the far-off Gentiles of Yale and Harvard."

On December 4, 1779, Elisha Parmele, evidently being about to return to his native State, presented to the society a petition for a "Charter Party to institute a branch of this society at Cambridge in Massachusetts." The very next day a called meeting was held and the charter was drawn up. With the spirit of unconscious prophecy Parmele petitioned that this branch be conducted "in a less mysterious manner," but this part of his petition was denied, as the "design appeared to be incompatible with the principles of this meeting."

Four days later a similar charter for establishing a branch at Yale was delivered to Parmele. It was not, however, till November, 1780, that he regularly organized the chapter at New Haven, after having previously initiated at Goshen, Connecticut (his native village), Ezra Stiles, son of the President of Yale, Samuel Newell, Reuben Parmele (presumably his brother), and Linde Lord, all Yale students. There were initiated at Yale in all about a dozen graduates and about the same number of juniors and seniors. He then communicated with four members of the senior class at Harvard and as a result a preliminary meeting was held July, 1781, though the chapter was not organized till September 5 of that year.

The Virginia chapter had by this time ceased to exist, but letters in cipher continued to pass for a brief period between the scattered members of the Alpha chapter and their New England brethren. Several of these letters are preserved in the archives of the Yale chapter, but only extracts have been printed. Dr. Hale incorporated into his article a long passage from a letter written by William Short to the Yale brothers: "I need not tell you," he writes, "how anxious I am to have everything respecting Phi Beta Kappa in Connecticut. . . . Such a warm attachment to the interests of our dear society runs through your

whole letter that I am doubly connected with you. . . . We pant after those who have since been joined to the immortal band. . . . I hope we shall also hear from that at Cambridge. . . . What has become of our very worthy member Mr. E. Parmele? He has been silent as the grave since his return to the northward. Wherever he is assure him of our sincere regard for him. He has endeared himself to us here, not only by his personal merit, but by his diligence in spreading the Phi Beta Kappa. Like the great luminary he carries light with him wherever he goes, vivifies all around him, and exhilarates the spirits of whomsoever he pleases to favor."

Parmele's career was brief, for at the early age of twenty-nine, only two years after this letter was written inquiring so affectionately about his health, he died near Hawkinstown, Virginia, at the seat of Col. Abraham Bird. The site of his grave has been marked by the society.

This same William Short, who here exhibits such splendid devotion and enthusiasm for the society, having distinguished himself as minister to the courts of France, Holland, and Spain, was, more than sixty years later, instrumental in reviving the parent chapter at William and Mary. In 1849, when the movement was made to restore the chapter at Williamsburg, William Short, then living in Philadelphia at the advanced age of ninety-three, took an active share in bringing to life again his old chapter, of which he had been the last president just sixty-eight years before.

Thus by a singular chain of circumstances the society, having died out in Virginia in 1781, was enabled to continue its existence in New England along the lines laid down by its worthy founders. These incidents of the transplanting of the society to New England and of its return to its native State sixty-eight years later form two of the most romantic episodes in the history of our American colleges.

Established thus at Yale in 1780 and at Harvard in 1781 (though the charter at Harvard bears the earlier date), the society, in spite of its missionary zeal, acted with great deliberation in granting charters to new chapters. In 1786 an application was received at Harvard from Dartmouth College,

New Hampshire, for the establishment of a branch society there, and after a vain attempt to communicate with the Williamsburg chapter to secure its approval, the Harvard branch united with the Yale branch in granting the application, so that on August 20, 1787, Dartmouth College became the fourth on the roll of chapters. From that time for exactly thirty years no new chapters were admitted, though applications were received, one from Providence College, Rhode Island, afterwards Brown University, and from certain petitioners in Augusta, Georgia. Both applications were rejected. It was thought inexpedient to transmit a charter to Providence College, as it would "lessen the dignity of the society at large and multiply similar applications from literary institutions of still less importance."

In 1817 Union College, Schenectady, New York, was granted a charter, followed by Bowdoin, Maine, in 1825, and Brown University in 1830, just thirty-nine years after it was rejected as Providence College. For fifteen years this list remained unchanged, with seven on the roll, counting William and Mary. Between 1845 and 1860 inclusive, a period of sixteen years, there were added eight new chapters; from 1860 to 1870 six chapters; from 1870 to 1890 ten chapters; from 1892 to 1899 nineteen; from 1901 to 1911 twenty-eight. At the eleventh council, held September 10, 1913, eight charters were granted, making a total of eighty-six chapters in the whole society.

The growth of the society has thus been gradual and sure, though it has won its way in the South far more slowly than in other parts of the country. Organized in Virginia and transplanted to New England, it did not return to its native home till 1849, when the chapter at William and Mary was revived, only to perish again in the time of the civil war. In 1851, in spite of great opposition on the part of the president, due to prejudices against secret societies in general and to Yankee clubs in particular, Professor Frederick A. P. Barnard, a Yale Phi Beta Kappa, then member of the faculty in the University of Alabama, succeeded in establishing a chapter in that University. Through an eloquent personal appeal to the Board of Trustees, he won them over to his side and eventually initiated to membership the prejudiced executive himself as well as most of

the members of his faculty. It was a notable diplomatic triumph on the part of Professor Barnard, who was afterwards President of Columbia College, New York, from 1864 to 1889, and whose name is perpetuated in Barnard College. The chapter at Tuscaloosa, however, shared the same fate as that at Williamsburg and perished during the war. After the war the society spread rapidly in the East and in the West, but no branch was established in the South till 1893, when it was revived for a second time at William and Mary with notable ceremony. Of the previously revived chapter of 1849 ten members were present, so that William and Mary has thus been able to preserve an unbroken continuity from the ancient fathers of Revolutionary times. Two years after William and Mary, Johns Hopkins was added to the list. In 1901 Vanderbilt was granted a charter, being the first in the South after the war, not counting Baltimore. In 1904 charters were granted to the University of North Carolina, Goucher College, Baltimore, and the University of Texas. Then the University of Virginia and Tulane were taken in in 1907; the University of West Virginia and Washington and Lee in 1910; and the University of Georgia in 1913, as well as the University of Alabama, whose chapter was revived that same year. Throughout the entire South, then, below Baltimore, there are at present only nine chapters, a small but distinguished list.

In its origin the society was strictly a secret organization, with a Latin motto and a Greek motto given on the medal in initials, S. P. (*Societas Philosophiæ*), and Phi Beta Kappa, the initials of the Greek words "Philosophy the Guide of Life," with a token of salutation, a grip, an oath of fidelity, and even certain benevolent features masonic in character. In 1826, however, as a result of the threatened revelations of the secrets of the Masons by William Morgan and in consequence of his subsequent mysterious disappearance and supposed drowning by the Masons, there swept over the country an anti-masonic movement which assumed such importance that it developed a political party in New York and even led to the founding of no less than thirty-two anti-masonic newspapers in that State. As a consequence all secret organizations without distinction were

condemned as subversive of religion and democracy. The Phi Beta Kappa suffered in this crusade. Avery Allen in his "Key to the Phi Beta Kappa," published in his *Treatise on Masonry*, 1831, criticised the motto of the society as follows: "Philosophy has been the watchword of infidels in every age, and by its learned and enchanting sound many unwary youths have been led to reject the only sure guide to heaven." And as we might expect, Jefferson's name was brought in and the charge was laid at his door of having founded this society and fostered in it such pernicious philosophic doctrines. In 1831, therefore, after prolonged and heated discussions, the Harvard chapter, largely through the influence of the Hon. John Quincy Adams, John Hancock, and Judge Story, voted that "no oath or form of secret shall be required of any member of the society."

Immediately after taking such action the Harvard chapter sent their president, Edward Everett, to Yale to persuade that chapter too to resolve its secrets. According to a contemporary account, "He used a tender tone, stood half drooping as he spoke, and touchingly set forth that the students at Harvard had such conscientious scruples as to keep them from taking the vow of secrecy, and the society life was thus endangered. There was stout opposition, but the motion prevailed and the missionary returned to gladden the tender consciences of the Harvard boys."

From that time to the present day the society has ceased to be a true fraternity and now both in character and function occupies a position unique among college organizations.

In the form of initiation provided by the parent chapter for the Harvard chapter, the person to be initiated, having been properly introduced, presents a paper in which he formally expresses his pleasure at the honor of being admitted to a society which has "Friendship for its basis, Benevolence and Literature for its Pillars." Thus it is evident that the three fundamental principles of the society were friendship, morality, and literature. "It was engrafted on the stock of friendship, in the soil of virtue, enriched by literature." The moral and religious character of the society is indicated by an article in the original constitution requiring an invocation to the Deity at the opening

of every meeting, and by the fact that heavy fines were imposed for intoxication and unbecoming conduct of any sort. It now remains to be seen how the society in those early days at William and Mary sought to carry out its principles, first in developing a spirit of benevolence and brotherly love, and second in cultivating a love of literature through regular programmes of declamation and debate, as well as by other means.

Originally the Phi Beta Kappa was a true fraternal organization, with practically all the features of a Greek-letter fraternity of to-day, having even a secret code by which the various chapters and members communicated with each other. It was, however, more than a mere exclusive society devoted to social pleasure or to the intellectual improvement of its members. Their conception of mutual obligation went further, for all the members were expected to aid one another in even more practical fashion. In the ceremony of initiation the candidate was required to answer the following questions: "Will you regard every worthy member of this society as a Brother? Will you assist them when in distress with your life and fortune?" And this benevolent feature, possibly adopted from Masonry, was further developed in an attempt on the part of the society at Williamsburg to "take under their care objects worthy of charity." As early as 1778 a committee was appointed to "look out for some orphan likely to receive advantage from being put to a proper school, and to make their report of the same to the ensuing meeting."

There is no further reference to this scheme in the Williamsburg records, but the Harvard chapter appears independently to have developed a somewhat similar beneficiary plan for relieving indigent brethren. In 1797, "it was thought expedient, without meaning to lose the literary in the humane institution, and without violating any charter restriction, to establish a fund, the object of which shall be to relieve those members of our brotherhood whom fortune may distress, to accommodate those who may wish for assistance, and in general to extend the advantages which result from a connection with the Phi Beta Kappa." Whereupon a collection was taken up for the purpose of establishing a fund, and at the close of the first year this fund, after deducting all

expenses, amounted to \$41.95. In 1803, it had increased to \$250. Owing, however, to the loss of some of the records, it is not known how long this fund continued to grow and to be applied to so worthy an object. The chief point of interest is that at a very early date the Phi Beta Kappa developed this benevolent feature so common to fraternal organizations to-day and foreshadowing the plan, not uncommon in our fraternities, of aiding needy students to work their way through college. As a continuation, or revival, of this policy, the National Council has recently established at William and Mary in memory of Elisha Parmele a scholarship for educating sons of members of the Phi Beta Kappa.

The original laws as adopted at William and Mary on March 1, 1777, provided that "four members be selected to perform at every session, two of whom in matters of argumentation, and the others in opposition," and that "such of the compositions as are deemed worthy by the society shall be carefully preserved and endorsed by whom and at what time delivered." It was resolved further "that three members be appointed to judge the performances and always to inform the ensuing meeting of their determination."

The plan seems to have been to have two carefully prepared papers written and delivered on some assigned subjects as leads, and have two other men appointed to follow with extemporaneous debate. For example, "Messrs. Brent and Clements were appointed to produce compositions inquiring whether Agriculture or Merchandise was most advantageous to a State; Messrs. Baker and Ballendine were appointed to argue on the same subject." The list of subjects debated at William and Mary, twenty-seven in number, contains a variety of topics, economic, political, social, historical. It may be of interest to cite a few: Whether the rape of the Sabine women was just; Whether all our affections and principles are not in some measure deducible from self-love; Whether theatrical exhibitions are advantageous to States, or the contrary; Whether anything is more dangerous to civil liberty in a free State than a standing army; The justice of African slavery; Whether the institution of ostracism was legal; Whether avarice or luxury is more beneficial to a Republic;

Whether dueling ought to have toleration in this or any other free State.

In looking back upon the past, however, there is danger lest we overexalt it and attribute to those who have gone before us ideals and motives of which they themselves were scarce conscious. Liberal as were the views of this little group of college boys in Williamsburg in this first year of our existence as an independent nation, like other college men of to-day they must have had a somewhat exaggerated notion of their own importance, and, with the natural enthusiasm of youth, had visions of a nation-wide influence on the part of their society. Their visions were splendid enough, but, as in all such college organizations of to-day, the burden of sustaining the society fell upon a select few who in their zeal and enthusiasm were forced to resort to desperate measures to keep their fraternity alive. Again and again we read in those early records of men who failed to do their duty even to the extent of attending the meetings. And on one occasion, "it appearing that the state of the society was declining through want of members, Resolved that a committee be appointed to take the same into consideration." It was found necessary to impose heavy fines on those who absented themselves, except for "some obstructing cause," or who failed to take their appointed parts in the programme. These records bring some element of consolation to those who may have struggled vainly to put new life into moribund literary societies with all their long list of distinguished alumni. Through such records we come to realize that the genus college boy has changed but little within the course of the century.

But more important yet in its influence on the intellectual growth of its members was the founding of a library by the Harvard chapter in 1785, when the chapter was but four years old. On November 29 of that year it was "voted that for establishing and regulating a library a tax of five shillings on each member be levied." As there were at that time about thirty-six members the funds must have amounted to about 180 shillings. The library must have grown rapidly, for soon it became necessary "to sell the chest which now contains the books to the highest bidder" and to purchase a bookcase. With the growth

of the society rules were adopted to govern the taking out of books and a catalogue was provided. During these early years the library must have been a valuable feature of the society and it was maintained for a period of sixty years, when it was voted to distribute the books so as "to render them most accessible and useful to the Students in College."

One other important feature of the literary programme which has had a permanent influence in Harvard and in all other institutions where there are chapters of the society must be mentioned, and that is, the custom of having an annual oration. In the early days when the membership was comparatively small, the annual orator was chosen from the society. The first anniversary celebration of the parent chapter was held December 5, 1777, at the Raleigh Tavern, Williamsburg, but of this meeting no record remains. The next year, however, a special effort was put forth to make the affair a memorable one. As far ahead as August 29 it was resolved "That every member absent from the society be written to in the most pressing terms to attend the 5th of December in order to celebrate that glorious day which gave birth to our happy union." Exactly how many responded we do not know, but the records tell us that the occasion was made noteworthy by the resignation of the first president of the society, John Heath; that he delivered a valedictory on the occasion; and that "the night was spent in jollity and mirth." During its existence at William and Mary the society depended altogether on its own members for annual orators at its anniversary celebrations, and always spent the evening in "sociability and mirth."

So far as the records show, this sociability and mirth did not lead to excesses in the Williamsburg chapter, although we cannot infer too much from this silence. At Harvard the annual dinners grew too convivial to suit the taste of the Rev. John Pierce of Brooklyn, an alumnus of the university, who with the exception of the year 1808, attended every commencement and every anniversary of the Phi Beta Kappa at Harvard for a period of forty-six years, from 1803 to 1848. From his MS. notes in the archives of the Harvard chapter we are able to gather vivid impressions of those festive occasions and of the orations and poems

delivered. In 1805 Dr. Pierce complains of the extravagance in "giving \$70 for the theatrical musicians, who were a nuisance, and in paying for twenty dinners which were not eaten," and resolves never to dine with the society again. Nearly forty years later he is aggrieved by the quantity of wine drunk and is nauseated by the tobacco so freely smoked, and he longs to see the day when at a Phi Beta Kappa dinner there shall be "no unnatural excitement from alcoholic liquors." His wish was fulfilled, for two years later the society voted to dispense with wine at its annual dinners in the future, and from that time, so far as the records show, there has been nothing to mar the dignity and decorum of these annual celebrations.

At the anniversary meeting at Harvard the custom of electing as orator one or two members of thier own chapter was kept up for some years. Of these college boy orations one of the most notable was that delivered in 1788 by John Quincy Adams, who had just graduated the year before at the age of twenty. From his own diary we learn that there were forty members present, including two brothers from Dartmouth, and that he had a very distinguished audience, consisting of: "His Excellency, John Hancock, Esq., Governour of the Commonwealth; Monsieur Senneville, Commander of his most Christian Majesty's Squadron at Boston, and the other officers of the Fleet; the French Consul residing at Boston; the Rev. President, Professors, Librarian, and Tutors of the University, and several other Gentlemen of distinction." In 1792, instead of celebrating the anniversary on September 5, the actual date of foundation, the time was changed for the future to the day after commencement day. As a result the annual celebrations of the society became more formal, and the orators were called from a distance. The programme, too, was varied by the addition of a poem, thus inaugurating a special feature of the Harvard celebrations. Beginning with Robert Treat Paine, in 1797, the list of poets is a long and distinguished one.

On the occasion of Lafayette's visit in 1824, Professor Edward Everett delivered an oration an hour and fifty-one minutes in length, on the means of intellectual improvement furnished by the condition and prospects of the United States. According

to one of the members present, "Long as it was and crowded as was the house to overflowing, no uneasiness was evinced by any single individual. The address at the close to Lafayette exceeded anything we have heard and drew tears from almost every eye." Lafayette himself offered the following toast: "This Antient University; this Literary Society. This Holy Alliance of Learning and Virtue and Patriotism is more than a match for any coalition against the rights of mankind."

The list of orators and poets at Harvard alone contains some of the most noted names in American literature, together with the names of some distinguished visitors from abroad. Among the orators are: George Ticknor, Edward Everett, Ralph Waldo Emerson, George Putnam, Andrew Preston Peabody, Henry Ward Beecher, George William Curtis, Charles Francis Adams, the elder, Wendell Phillips, Charles Francis Adams, Jr., Daniel Coit Gilman, Henry Cabot Lodge, James Bryce, Woodrow Wilson. Among the poets appear the following names: Bryant, Emerson, Holmes, Longfellow, Bret Harte, Richard Watson Gilder, Henry Van Dyke, Clinton Scollard, and Percy MacKaye.

Says Dr. Hale in his *Atlantic* article: "For nearly half a century the Phi Beta Kappa was the only society in America devoted to literature and philosophy, and it happened therefore that in the infant literature of the nation some noteworthy steps are marked by orations and poems delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa."

With its birth coincident with that of our Nation, with a roll of members containing such a list of distinguished names as few other societies can boast of, with a record of unselfish service in the cause of sound scholarship, what is the present function of the society in our colleges? Has it made for itself a distinct place in the minds and hearts of our college men and women? Is it continuing to live up to the ideals established by its founders in colonial days and can it still command the respect and reverence which it inspired in years gone by? Such questions naturally suggest themselves to our minds as we review the splendid past of a noble fraternity.

Whatever may have been the conscientious scruples that

induced those Harvard boys to reveal the secrets of the fraternity, there can be no question that through the disclosure of these secrets, harmless as they were found to be, the society lost a very important element of coherence in the eyes of the undergraduates, its prestige was seriously diminished, and it was long in recovering from the blow it received. The transformation of the society was slow and its exact function in the college community was for many years not clearly defined. At Yale in the early seventies membership in the society was regarded, in the words of a contemporary, as a "mere formal compliment paid by the faculty to high scholarship." Even the right to wear the key was spoken of as a "fiction, myth, abstraction, or what not, and became an object of much merriment." At Harvard, too, Dr. Edward Everett Hale in 1879 ironically denominates the Phi Beta Kappa "A Fossil from the Tertiary."

Soon after the secrets were disclosed other Greek-letter fraternities arose and occupied the field just vacated by the Phi Beta Kappa. The literary functions of the Phi Beta Kappa were not sufficient to differentiate it from the other college literary societies, so that it took some time for the society to adjust itself to the changed conditions and make for itself a definite place in the college world. Its very existence was again and again threatened, and its survival from those troublous times is a tribute to its splendid vitality.

In 1834, at Harvard, the society became practically what it is to-day, an organization bound together by ties of scholarship rather than by oaths of secrecy; and from this year on, the distinction was made between graduate and undergraduate members, the latter often being called "Immediate Members." As the graduates far outnumbered the undergraduates, the government of the society came naturally into the hands of the graduates, and the society ceased to be a mere local collegiate organization, or students' club.

Up to the year 1880 the Alpha Chapter in each State had the power of creating new chapters within its own State, subject, of course, to the approval of other chapters. In 1880, however, the first steps were taken for a national organization. It was not until 1883 that the present constitution of the United Chapters

was adopted and that the power of granting charters was conferred on the National Council meeting every three years.

Through the creation of this National Council the society has materially strengthened itself, has gained in dignity and importance, and at the same time, by stringent regulations, has protected itself against the intrusion of second-rate institutions into its ranks. Moreover, in recent years this council has begun to exercise greater supervision over the local chapters, so as to bring about more complete uniformity in election to membership. At the last meeting of this National Council in September, 1913, a committee was appointed to report on a fraternity policy. Though advocating no radical changes, it sought to declare certain definite principles for the guidance of the local chapters. The model constitution for new chapters proposed by this committee recognizes three classes of members:—

- (1) The best scholars of the graduating class;
- (2) Those graduates whose post-graduate work entitles them to such honor;
- (3) Any person distinguished in letters, science, or education.

As to the qualifications of the first class, the committee recommended that not more than one fifth of the class should be elected, unless that fraction should cause the number to be less than five. They advise a smaller fraction for larger classes and declare that in no case should the constitutional limit of one fourth be exceeded. Since the society began as an association of undergraduate students, the committee believes in the policy of electing resident members from the junior class, in order to keep the society in more intimate relationship with the life of the college. "Such elections should be restricted to a small number of students of exceptionally high scholarship who have been members of the class from the beginning of the course. Not more than one third of the total number to be chosen from the class should be elected in the junior year."

Regarding the election of graduate students the committee and the National Council, having had insufficient time to give to the subject the attention it deserves, have enacted no legislation and made no suggestions.

Honorary membership, the committee rightly insisted, should

be rigidly guarded; elections should be few; and except on special occasions, such as centennial anniversaries of chapters, not more than two persons should be chosen to membership in one year by any chapter.

One other safeguard which tends to restrict wholesale election to membership by new chapters, was set up by the National Council in 1910 in a resolution which declares that "the election to membership by any chapter of large numbers of persons who graduated previous to the granting of the chapter's charter should be discouraged; and that retroactive election of members in course and of honorary members should be restricted to a number equivalent to a small percentage of the active membership of each chapter."

Thus all the efforts of the National Council have been directed towards making the society more coherent, and the action of the various chapters more harmonious and efficient.

In the minds of the founders the chief function of the society was to promote scholarship rather than merely to reward it. And to-day also the leaders of the society regard the granting of membership not as an end in itself but as a means to an end. In order to make this more evident to the new chapters, the society has now under consideration a new form of initiation with a view to recommending its general use. In some chapters to-day, however, the idea seems to be in granting the key to bestow a reward on those who have earned it. Apparently it is difficult to distinguish between these two functions; and yet the distinction is useful and should be made; for, having lost its elements of coherence as an undergraduate society, the organization may, in the eyes of some, seem to exist solely for the purpose of awarding in perfunctory fashion certain honors which have been earned through honest effort. Indeed, in some institutions the Phi Beta Kappa might even seem to offer an analogy to football, the key symbolizing in intellectual lines what the Varsity letter stands for in the case of members of the first team.

In these days when athletics absorb such an undue proportion of the students' activities; when the literary societies are having a hard struggle for existence, and in some instances have de-

generated into debating societies, with teams trained by paid coaches like football squads to win in intercollegiate contests, surely there is more need than ever of a society which fosters in the student a love of learning, which encourages him in intellectual activity, which inspires him with a profound respect for scholarship. Having passed through two wars, the War of the Revolution and the War between the States, the society is now stronger than ever and is growing in its influence on the intellectual life of our colleges. Though it no longer binds its members by solemn oaths to assist one another with life and property, it lays upon each initiate obligations no less sacred, to live up to its ideals and traditions of devoted scholarship, its lofty principles of morality, of benevolence, and of Christian service. Animated by such a spirit the Phi Beta Kappa is in a fair way to fulfil the noble purposes of its founders—"to destroy the prejudices that too frequently subsist between different universities"—and help to bring about a fraternal union of the "wise and virtuous" throughout the whole country.

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